

Challenges and Opportunities in the New and Expanded Mandate of UNOG within the UN system.

***Statement by Vladimir Petrovsky to the Staff of
UNOG***

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General Assembly Hall

Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Colleagues,

Let me openly and frankly outline my plans of work in the political, administrative, financial and other fields. Over the next few days, you will have an opportunity to reflect on, and discuss among you, those plans and you will, no doubt, consider their strong and weak points. In a week or so, I plan to visit and familiarize myself with each and every Office, Division and Service at UNOG. I will then have an opportunity to have your feedback, your concrete ideas and suggestions on my vision for the future of UNOG. This is my approach and my starting point as new Director-General of this Office.

These days we hear so much talk about the United Nations. But what is the UN from inside? We have of course UN Headquarters in New York. We have Offices of the UN in Geneva, Vienna, Nairobi, etc. There is then

the family of UN specialized Agencies and Programmes. And, of course, we have the staff, which forms the Secretariat, a principal organ of the UN.

Therefore, when we speak about the UN, we do not refer only or exclusively to New York, particularly when there are some 2600 staff members of the UN here at UNOG. We must be conscious of the fact that Geneva has its specific trade-mark in the UN system as a birthplace of multilateral diplomacy and humanitarian efforts and prominent Conference Centre.

Dear Colleagues,

Today, the United Nations is facing totally unprecedented challenges. With the end of the Cold War, not only the post-war confrontational structure collapsed, but also the basic elements of the traditional international system dating back to the Treaty of Westphalia of 1648 are fading away. The new world system is in the making. It is not "PAX unilateral" anymore. The emerging system is the system of peace, security and cooperation based on the UN Charter. That is "PAX UN".

The Organization, which mirrors these evolutionary changes, starts to adapt to the new environment and shifts its focus from passively registering ideological differences to actively solving complex crisis situations. The tasks of the Organization in those instances are no longer limited to the maintenance of international peace and security in the traditional sense but also include the new dimensions of preventive diplomacy, peace-making and peace-building. The practical actions carried out are essential to the three interdependent objectives of peace, development and democracy which

constitute the priorities of the UN today and give reality to the role that the Founding Fathers had expected from the UN in the aftermath of the Second World War.

In order to succeed in meeting the new challenges as we approach the year 2000 and in developing a new international framework in which the UN can effectively operate, the UN should address and resolve a twin problem of structure and of substance. We need to strengthen the ability of the family of the United Nations to work together under one roof; we need to develop effective relations between UN offices and regional institutions and organizations; we need to enhance the timely flow of communication and information as well as the exchange of experiences thus avoiding any duplication of efforts or waste between the UN and other institutions.

We urgently need therefore to devise a new global and regional system of relationships focused on issues and based on informal but effective mechanisms of consultation and dialogue which would make possible real cooperative endeavours between the UN and its partner organizations and institutions thus opening up new opportunities and breaking up the barriers of division and fragmentation of the past.

During his first year in office as Secretary-General of the UN has developed a clear vision of the direction to follow and of the priorities of our Organization. His reports "Agenda for Peace" and the "New Dimensions of Disarmament" contain clear blueprints for action in the rough and uncharted waters of world politics.

When it comes to the structure of the UN, you know that the Secretary-General is undertaking a process of reform that aims at streamlining the whole operation and making it more effective, in line with our new priorities. In this connection, the Secretary-General has repeatedly reiterated that there has to be a better distribution of tasks between New York Headquarters and other UN Offices. As stated to the General Assembly in his report on the Status of the Organization as well as in his address of 2 November 1992:

"A primary objective will be a more effective Organization-wide distribution of responsibilities and balance between functions performed at Headquarters and those carried out by the regional commissions and other UN organs and programmes, based on a clear understanding of our priorities and the comparable advantage of each component",

and also

"Striking the right balance between Headquarters and other centres, on the one hand and regional structures, on the other, is a key question. I believe that the balance has shifted too much to the centre."

In keeping with the policy defined by the Secretary-General, I believe that the United Nations Office at Geneva, as a catalyst of both global and regional efforts, can make full use of its "comparable advantages" in humanitarian and human rights issues, economic and trade questions, disarmament and related security matters, to create an efficient network with UN specialized agencies and programmes and the European regional organizations and thus become a focal point of UN integrated approach.

Geneva is a unique international centre of diplomatic and legal know-how which goes back to well before the time of the League of Nations. Furthermore, more than 50 % of the practical, operational work of the UN is carried out in Geneva: work that affects people, countries, legislations,

practices; in one word, the real world. It is the largest conference centre of the UN, with some 7,000 meetings organized each year, and more than ever utilized for highly political matter: for instance the Conference on the Former Yugoslavia, a first example of partnership between the UN and a regional institution, the European Community.

Looking ahead, I see four major directions for the renewal and the expansion of the mandate of UNOG:

A. Geneva is and will certainly expand as a centre for conference diplomacy and an international forum for consultations cooperation and dialogue between nations in Europe, the Mediterranean, Africa and the Euro-Asian Continent.

B. As the second largest centre of the United Nations for global activities of the Organization, Geneva will increasingly enhance its contribution in the fields of Human Rights, Disarmament and related security issues, economic, development and trade issues as part of the integrated strategy of the Secretary-General for sustainable development. As you may know, discussions in the past few days in New York seem to suggest that there is a possibility that the Offices of Disarmament, Transnational Corporation and Science and Technology may be relocated at UNOG.

C. UNOG will also strengthen cooperation and dialogue with the agencies and other parts of the UN family that operate in Geneva and in Europe: particularly, ILO, WHO, FAO, UNESCO as well as UNHCR, UNICEF, UNDP. It will strengthen also relations with the NGO community as well

as with such established institutions as the ICRC.

D. Finally, as a focal point for European activities of the UN in particular in preventive diplomacy, peace-keeping, peace-making, and peace-building, UNOG is able to catalyze regional cooperation with institutions such as the CSCE, the European Community, and the Council of Europe.

This is most heartening: yet Geneva is not always recognized for what it does; the impression outside Geneva is not commensurate to its real contribution to the work of the Organization: this has to change. I will do my very best to modify this impression and to shape an image of UNOG more in line with reality. I will spare no effort to talk to Government Officials, representatives of the media as well as our colleagues in New York Headquarters, to highlight your contribution to the work of the Organization.

In this up-hill battle to modify an image of UNOG which is not reflecting the reality of things, I need your help and your encouragement. I need your assistance and expertise. More than anything else, I need your trust.

In implementing the tasks that the Secretary-General has entrusted to me, I intend to enhance in our Office an atmosphere of mutual openness and confidence and strengthening the efficiency and effectiveness of our operations. I want to stress here the importance of timely and complete information and dialogue between management and staff: this is the only way to avoid the usual, often pervasive, rumours, which are so abundant

here in Geneva. In Russia there is a saying: "There is no smoke without fire". Geneva has sometimes been able to break the laws of nature and indeed have a lot of smoke without fire. My feeling is that rumours are a reflection of the lack of proper communication and exchange of information between managers and staff. That is something that has to be changed and I intend to bring this change about.

I would like to assure you that there are no grounds for pessimistic views about the future of our Office at Geneva, despite the on-going restructuring and other economy measures being carried out within the United Nations system.

While reform is bound to challenge the established structure and the established practices, it is not carried out for its own sake. I wish to stress that the on-going reforms aim at increasing the efficiency, productivity and responsiveness of the Organization under the new conditions. They also aim at streamlining unnecessary layers of management and at increasing both responsibility and accountability of staff members at all levels. The reform will of course affect Geneva but it is intended to reinforce the role and prestige of our Office, not to diminish it.

The policies and reforms of the UN will not stand the test of time without the full understanding and support of the staff and the effective leadership of the managers.

Keeping in mind this objective, I look forward to your innovative input, your ideas based on experience and the willingness to improve specific sectors of this Office that are familiar to you. I count on your

suggestions as to how to make the best of our highly qualified human resources at UNOG. One of my objectives is to blend together the best and longest tradition of international public service available here with the most modern management techniques and management practices.

Nowadays, "business as usual" will simply not suffice. In the long-run, it will not work at all. We have to anticipate change and adjust to it in good time. We must realize that the UN is already operating in a crisis situation and not under normal conditions. That requires a greater and better distribution of responsibilities among staff members and a higher sense of discipline and our Office of the Director-General should serve as a good example.

In order to provide the effective functioning of UNOG, it is necessary more rationally distributed responsibilities and competences between New York and Geneva.

I wish to inform you that a Task Force has been created to review the administrative, financial, personnel and conference service action that Geneva could undertake on its own, without the lengthy delays due to the need of receiving the "OK from New York". In other words, the key objective of this review is decentralization, whenever appropriate, and the consequent delegation of authority.

The report of this task force will be presented to the Secretary-General in June this year.

Talking about the staff, the Secretary-General outlined his main

objectives to the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly on 6 November which are:

" to ensure that its service to the Organization is duly recognized, properly supported and developed and justly rewarded" as well as "to preserve its independence and integrity and to promote the highest standards of efficiency and competence."

My intention as Director-General of UNOG is to give effect in this Office to the objectives set by the Secretary-General and to pull all our available resources and energies together to achieve those objectives.

In this connection the Sec-Gen has already indicated his comprehensive career development plan whose main elements are:

- improvement of the status of women in the secretariat, particularly in its higher echelon;
- an improved appraisal system, taking into account the ability of staff to adapt to new challenges;
- a transparent promotion system which will reward staff for competence, creativity, versatility, and mobility;
- strong emphasis on expanded training programmes (presently only 0.27% of budget);
- measures to ensure that staff at all levels are held accountable for their performance and professional conduct.

I intend to direct the Office of Personnel here at UNOG to develop already at this stage policies and practices which are fully consistent with these principles outlined by the Secretary-General.

In addition I have already requested the Divisions of Administration and Conference Services to :

- review the situation of women at UNOG in preparation for an

Action Plan for Women that would, with specific targets each year, move closer towards the objectives set by the Sec-Gen for 1995,

An Officer for the implementation of this Plan reporting directly to me will be appointed shortly,

- review training programmes at UNOG with a view to expand their number and reach and make them more effective,

- review the employment of office automation and modern communication technology at UNOG, with a view to move closer throughout UNOG to the levels reached at New York HQ,

- review the level of support by the Administration and Conference Services of UNOG to the expanding needs of the Centre for Human Rights,

- review of the support of the Information and NGOs services of UNOG to the growing requirements of the Centre for Human Rights, in view of the World Conference in June 1993,

- reinforce the role of the Senior Legal Officer in my own Cabinet as an adviser to staff members of UNOG for matters related to their privileges and immunities as well as to their relations with the Host country or with France for those staff living across the border.

- I will also establish monthly meetings with the representatives of the staff council so as to review situations affecting the staff of UNOG and improve it. My relation with the staff council will be based on a balance of interests: I believe, however, that our interests do coincide.

In order to increase the communication and the sharing of information between my Office and other services and Offices at UNOG I have taken a number of measures including:

- expansion of weekly meetings with heads of all divisions and services

and the heads of the Centre for Human Rights, the Geneva Offices of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, and of Disarmament Affairs, the Director of Information, the Chief of Security, plus my own Cabinet.

- establishment of bi-weekly meetings with the Heads of UN offices and programmes located at Geneva (UNICEF, UNDP, UNITAR, etc.) to enhance the flow of communication and the identification of problems as well as the strategies for their most effective solution.

- establishment of monthly meeting with the heads of Agencies or Offices in Geneva with a view to try to identify problems and propose solutions with a common approach to our New York Headquarters.

As you are aware, many of our colleagues have served or are presently serving in the field with UN Peace-keeping operations. This is not only an example of dedication and commitment to the ideals of the Charter, but also of personal courage in the face of mounting threats to our staff in the field. We must also remember that many of UN staff members are presently detained in a number of countries. I should particularly pay tribute to those staff of UNOG who have left their families behind and have sacrificed their own lives in such field operations in the accomplishment of specific UN objectives and, more in general, in our continuing quest for a better world.

Protection of the staff is of course a primary concern of the Secretary-General and my own. That is why I intend to strengthen the ability of our Office to respond to all questions related to field service of UNOG staff. I want an effective and functioning focal point for matters related to the security of staff on mission in the field. I will ask the chief of personnel to review present procedures and to act as a matter of the highest priority

with information concerning the security of staff so as to facilitate as much as possible the communication and or information between the staff and their families.

Dear Colleagues,

All of you, I know, have taken up your UN duties with a sense of mission: that of making a real contribution to the improvement of the human condition, in keeping with the UN Charter. The effort of every single staff member is crucial at the present time.

Today, more than ever, millions of children, women and men look at us for help and leadership in the face of famine, oppression, and conflict: We certainly cannot remain indifferent to those urgent cries for help. We cannot but reform ourselves and our structures to better meet those needs: I am sure that together we will succeed: together we will make our own meaningful contribution to UN leadership through concrete action.

Thank you.